PRAYERS FOR TIMES OF GRIEF

Monica Malakar

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Dedicated to my beloved husband and best friend Albert Anup Malakar (Apu), our inspirational uncle Matthew Malakar, and my maternal uncles – Rev. B.D. Biswas, Mr A. K. Biswas, Mr T. K. Biswas and families. The Bible verse below is God's promise to all who love Him.

" And he shall be like a tree planted by the stream of water,
That bringeth forth its fruit in its season,
Whose leaf also doth not wither;
And whatsoever he doeth shall prosper"
Psalm 1: 3

Grief – a pain that nothing seems to console. A lingering reality that life has changed forever and will never be the same. It comes in many shapes, forms, and shadows. This prayer book is an endeavor to bring some comfort to the grieving soul, which often is totally lost in this world, yet has to linger and endure the monotony of reality every single day.

A relentless struggle that seems to have no end in sight. The book is written in all three tenses – past, present, future, as I believe our loved ones, those who are in Christ never die, but have changed their abode from an earthly to a divine one. That is our HOPE. We will see them in His home - John 14: 1-4. This book of prayers tries to understand, comfort, and bring some solace to the grieving soul through the love and comfort of our Lord Jesus Christ - Matthew 5: 4.

The writings are based on my own experiences, thus portrayed through personal feelings or emotions that resonate through people or persons in my life. In this, it is subjective and yet universal, not intended to cause hurt or pain to anyone. It is too human, too universal for that.

If, my emotions are a reflection of the human experience, then this prayer book will hopefully reach out to those who through their personal relationships great or small reflect upon the human experience.

I have no writing experience except in my professional life working as a development worker in Bangladesh. I hope you will forgive these limitations and find some comfort in these words that come from the heart.

This prayer book is set in Bangladesh formerly East Pakistan. Three faiths mingle here – Islam the majority, followed by Hinduism and Christianity. Our family is Christian - a very small religious group in Bangladesh, but one sustained by Almighty God.

Loss of Parents:

Mother and Father or Ma and Baba in my language Bengali. Two of the most precious yet emotional words in the human vocabulary. They evoke tremendous love and endurance to exasperation and rage. So many emotions in just two words, the beginning of our human entity, our identity. Yes Lord, while creating me in my mother's womb, you gave me these two persons who would be entwined with me forever – my ma and baba. You gave them to me as my earthly identity, my nature and nurture. I was them till I developed my own identity but with their footprints. They taught me who you are Lord Jesus, the biggest blessing of my life, though I did not always see that. Ma, you have always been my very best friend through it all. Always held me in your arms no matter what I have done in life. Baba, you gave me the support I needed through your love and wisdom. They are irreplaceable. I long to see you.

Both my parent were doctors, accomplished ones given the many challenges they faced running a hospital in Rajshahi in East Pakistan and later Bangladesh. However, God blessed them through their lives that were filled with pain, loss, and yes joy too. Both were gifted speakers and I remember people waiting to hear them in church and elsewhere, especially ma who had this wonderful gift of speaking about her faith and the human experience. My baba's historical narratives of the past entwined with his faith in God was beautiful, though at times a bit lengthy! God also gave them an international identity as His children through their love for Him.

One thing that I learnt from them and cherish is their love for humanity, no matter the circumstances, and a humility that is rare in this world today. I think of my parents as people who crossed class boundaries – they did not believe in this. I keep on hoping that my brother Paul and I have inherited this from them to whatever degree. They were kind. They were helpful. They stood by people. They were honest, a rare quality nowadays. They had their weaknesses too – my dad's temper, my ma's stubborn streak, but through it all they endeavored to teach my brother and I to be simple and honest in life. There is a lot to learn from their generation. They are our earthly teachers of life. May they forgive me for any pain or loss they endured because of me.

Lord, when I was certain that they were mine forever, you took them from me. You took them to a place I don't know where, or can never reach in my earthly existence. I am without a womb. How do I now live each day knowing that each dawn will not begin with them at home, nor each night with their loving presence. I am lost without them. Help me Lord to understand that this is the way it is meant to be. That they are in a better place than here on earth. They have returned to the source of all life, and someday I will too. This earthly time of pain and grief will not endure. May I always remember each moment of their joy, laughter, tears, pain, and love for

my brother and me. A love that will endure forever in this world and the next. Fill this void in my soul with their enduring and everlasting love Lord. Ma " You are the wind beneath my wings" (quote from song by Bette Midler). Baba you are a part of that too. Baba and ma hold me till I see you again.

Prayer:

Hold me Lord Jesus and help me to feel your love and the love of my parents, each and every day. They taught me to love you. The pain of separation is deep, help me Lord Jesus to fill this void. Parents are your special creation Lord. Your love that came into my life through my ma and baba will endure in my earthly existence. As a child I thank you from my soul for giving me such loving parents who taught me what life is. May I receive your forgiveness Lord for the numerous times I have grieved them. May this love and forgiveness teach me to be loving and kind to others, as they taught me about your love and compassion. I do not deserve them, but thank you for granting me this special gift of your love, manifest through my ma and baba.

Loss of Spouse:

Our life was surrounded by music. This was the foundation of our love - music and all its beautiful melodies, reflecting the beauty of life. You are a very talented musician. I am so grateful to God for using this talent for His glory. Today, I saw the film – "A Star Is Born" again. We saw this together. It is about music, love, and loss. My husband Albert was a shy person, but shined when it came to music and wit. I remember with so much awe and love when you told me you had loved me since childhood. I recall walking with you in Mouripur Camp, Karachi, Pakistan, to go and see an English movie in the local movie hall. Just you and me. I will always remember that walk with you. You were so kind and caring - true friends.

The love, the heartache, the pain, the loss, the separation, the joy and discovery of true love and friendship- the beautiful melody that binds two persons together – something this world can never take away. This love is eternal, life cannot diminish it. We were and still are the best of friends – you and I. Always will be. Isn't it wonderful to know that our love though tried with so many earthly tribulations, always stood up and won, and will always do.

Albert's talent as a musician was manifested in various forums, but specially through church choirs – at the Assembly of God Church, Dhaka, other forums, and later at Gethsemane Baptist Church, Mirpur 10, Dhaka Bangladesh. There were not many musical instruments in this church then - early 1990s. However, Jesus built His choir at this church in Mirpur, and used Apu as a cornerstone. Gradually, a beautiful choir emerged now led by our pastor's son Danny who was mentored by Apu and was one of his closest friends.

God used Albert and others to build this choir. It was a true labour of love and God created it through this group. Today, the music and singing emanating from this choir touches the soul – a

precious gem belonging to the Lord. I still see my Apu's smile through that choir at church. God gives us talents and if we let Him use them for His glory they shine. That is what happened at Gethsemane Baptist Church in Bangladesh.

Albert's last day on earth is - 17th September, 2023. Jesus granted us one of our most precious moments together in the hospital ICU. This was our last earthly journey together. For almost an hour I held his right hand. You my love were unconscious and on life support. My right hand was on your heart. Joya your sister was with us.

For almost an hour, Jesus let us be together till I felt your strong heartbeat just stop under my hand – your very last breath on earth. It was 4: 18 pm. For me everything on earth stood still at that moment and has till now. The Lord let us be together till your earthly existence ceased and your heavenly journey began. You looked so serene and peaceful. A beautiful smile on your lips.

I left you there at Narinda – 22 September, 2023, a beautiful day – the kind you love so much - gentle dappled sunlight, a soft cool breeze, fluffy clouds. You lie next to my parents, and hope you have met yours in the Lord's abode. You too are " the wind beneath my wings", my best friend. I wait to join you.

Prayer:

Jesus please let me feel the arms of my loved one around me. Let the love and deep friendship of a life-time be ours forever Lord. Help me to live without my best friend, who loved me despite all my failings. Who understood me better than I understand myself. Please my love hold me and pray for me as you did everyday here on earth. Thank you Jesus for giving me your love through my Albert, so forgiving, full of understanding and compassion. Please Lord forgive me for the times I have misunderstood the love of my life and caused him pain or loss. I pray the same for a husband who has lost a loving wife, the friend of a life -time. Lord bless these unions eternally.

Loss of Sibling/s:

We grew up together, spent our childhood days with one another, were friends, and sometimes drifted apart because of life choices, but we were and are two branches of the same tree that bore us through life, and I believe will bear us through eternity. God made us siblings because He had a plan for us. We were not sent to earth without a purpose. We needed to find that through our earthly journey together, being there for each other as it was meant to be.

Yes, we have had our trials, our mutual misunderstandings, but through it all the Lord pulled us back into His purpose that He has created us for. Sometimes it didn't work that way. The choice was ours not His. But when it did work it was God's wondrous love and blessings at work through

us. Life is so different without your presence, not hearing your steps beside me, your hugs and laughter. Matter of time. We will do so again in our divine home that the Lord has prepared for us.

Prayer: Lord Jesus help us to bear this loss of a brother or sister, who was also a beloved friend. Life is hard enough without a good friend, and you were part of my life in laughter and sorrow. You are missed my friend, my brother , my sister. We walked through many "valleys of death" together, but we were side by side. We were there for each other despite differences. We overcame. Not always easy to do, but there was forgiveness, wisdom and that comes with the years. Till we meet again.

Loss of Relative:

You were among my closest relatives. It didn't matter on which side of the family you were – father or mother's side. We were more like siblings than relatives. Grew up together, or met from time to time, or only on some special occasion, or hardly at all. Yet, through the years till you were gone forever did I realize fully what you meant to me, and how sorely I miss you now and always will. Remember the holidays, the running way from home in search of destiny because the grownups did not understand, or being together from childhood to middle age and beyond.

So many memories – bitter and sweet. So may lessons to be learnt along the way. Standing up for each other though the reasons may not have always been altruistic. Over the years you were there, the one I could lean on, could trust – now gone forever. We were there for each other. It's hard that I can't see you now. I will see you on the other side where there is no more pain, loss and separation. Wait for me!

Prayer:

On earth I prayed for you as you did for me, maybe sometimes interspersed with periods of doubt, despair, misunderstandings, and distant silence . However, for me and most of us we met again on this earthly journey – sometimes frequently, sometimes few and far apart. But in our years here we connected. In our older years we connected spiritually in a space " that passes all understanding" – and brings peace. I pray you have found that peace, and kept the door ajar for me so that I may join you never to be separated again. I thank the Lord for the love you gave me, for understanding me when no-one did.

Loss of Friend:

Is there much difference between a good friend and family? I think the answer is NO, but that is my opinion only. A truly good friend is family. In life we do not usually have many good friends - friends yes, but truly good friends – I think that is rare. However, when we do have one or more

such friends they are true treasures. Very fortunate – but few are so blessed. My parents and our family had one such friend – Mr Sultan our Sultan Kaku (uncle). There were a few others too- the wonderful friends at the Rajshahi Universty, expatriate and missionary friends including the English nursing staff, the Bangladeshi staff, relatives and friends in Rajshahi, and others who knew us and treated us like family. When such friends depart from earth leaving a trail of heartache behind, many of us are left with a feeling that we did not always say what was in our heart, and now it was too late. One feels bereft, helpless. Life seems so unfair. No second chances to say the things you were not able to say. Things that mattered. Thoughts that will now linger forever here on earth. No second chance. Will have to wait till it's our time to leave.

Prayer:

Lord, I have lost my friend. One who is in so many ways like you. To whom I could go at any time and pour out my heart because like you Jesus, my friend was not judgmental, especially when the world didn't seem to understand or feel my pain. You gave me a few such friends on earth who understood me when the world did not. Such friends are like a rare pearl, like the one mentioned in your Word -Matthew 13: 45-46. I thank you Lord for such friends. Life is and will be very empty without them. Please grant me the strength to go on.

Loss of Teacher/Mentor:

Teachers – such wonderful or terrifying persons even distant. We remember them because they either lifted us up and taught us how to walk in this world, or made us doubt ourselves and our abilities. They were also those in -between such experiences. To a great extent, your presence in my life made me what I am today. Without your guidance, encouragement, perseverance, smile, even discouragement I would not be here today as I am. Many small and big challenges have I been able to face and survive because of your teachings – never give in, to try one's utmost to be fair, not to cheat, or through your discouragements, admonishments learned to be wise and patient. From some of you to trust in God and His righteousness. I am indebted to all of you. With your teachings, silent prayers and my parent's blessings, God has brought me to this place that I now traverse – hard and difficult, but with the Lord's presence and your blessings.

Prayer:

Dear Jesus, I thank you for my teachers, who were my parents at school. Without them I would not be here today as I am. Whether aggravating at times, or a true friend they taught me much about life as I have traversed through it till now. I have now reached the final journey home to you, as some of them did before me. I thank you for the ones who remembered me many years after, and to whom I was able to reach out later. They reminded me of your love and grace. Bless them Lord now where ever they may be.

Loss of Pastor/Church Friend:

My childhood is filled with the memories of church as a child, teenager and later as an adult. Many years were spent in Rajshahi, and I remember with utmost love and reverence our pastor – Rev. P.K. Baroi, my " jethamoshai" (like my father's elder brother). He baptized me and my brother. Then came Pastor Calvin Olson and his wonderful wife Marianne Olson at Assembly of God Church, Dhaka, Bangladesh, who truly led me to you Lord. Then our Pastor, Rev. Michael S. Das, our dada (like elder brother) and his wife didi, Rev. Judith Milita Das (like our elder sister), and family came into my husband Albert and my life, my mother, aunt, and family's life.

Dada was a dynamic disciple of Christ and was always inspiring us, always inviting us, teaching us to follow our Lord and find peace in life. A true pastor's life is never easy. Dada, Didi, and the others personified that. All these co-workers of yours Lord helped us to navigate the trials in this world that we often do not understand, or know how to cope with. Lord, we thank you with hearts full of gratitude and thanksgiving for their love, prayers, and sacrifice. Without them many of us would not be here today at Calvary.

Our pastor, Rev. Das, was like an older brother to my husband and me - our dearly beloved dada, one of a kind. You are a true friend and guide. You are now with the Lord. All of you who dedicated your lives to the service of others. From our childhood to now you all have been our moral compasses. Protect them Lord Jesus, they are truly yours, they have helped us to navigate this world of sorrow, temptations and trials and find victory in you Lord Jesus.

Prayer:

Dear Lord, thank you for these co-workers of yours who help us to find you and be our earthly guide. As they struggle through life with many distractions, problems, weaknesses, and strife, we pray Lord for your special dispensations, your precious blessings on these co-workers that you have chosen to help us and lead us in you. Their loss is irreplaceable, but you have chosen others to take their place so your grace on us may continue. Please Lord bless them, nuture them, and use them for your glory.

Loss of Physician:

We were very fortunate to have family physicians mostly specialists in their fields with post-graduate degrees from abroad. All friends of my parents. Their children became our friends. Their families came to the hospital for treatment though there were two government hospitals in Rajshahi. They came to the Christian Mission Hospital. That is how our special relations grew. One of them a very well known pediatrician in Bangladesh, and later our National Professor Bangladesh, Dr. Mohammad Rafi Khan, was one of them. A softspoken, accomplished physician with a daughter Mandy. Mandy was a childhood friend, who I hear is now an accomplished

physician herself. I mention Dr M.R. Khan, as I knew him from childhood as our "special doctor" uncle. All of them always brought hope and healing – qualities given to them by the Almighty.

Lord it is like losing a dear family friend when such a person is taken from us. I have witnessed many such loss. When such a loss occurs we feel helpless as they were all dear family friends. Such is the bond between them and us. They are like our teachers, an imperative part of us. They become our confidants. When they leave us, we are bereft, helpless. As if a part of us is gone forever. Lord, bless these healers whom you have created for our benefit. You healed the sick, so do they. Use them for mankind and your glory, and thank you Lord for providing their loving help and care to us.

Prayer:

Lord, you have created this special group of people to heal mankind of illness just as you did and do. They are special, as though you have endowed them with your special powers to heal the sick. When they are gone its often like losing a member of the family. Many a times they know us from childhood, like our teachers and our parents. Losing them is like losing a member of the family, a friend who was there to understand and provide help and healing to us mentally and physically, to take care. Often providing a shoulder to lean on when there was none. The loss is often irreplaceable. Help us to cherish them, and never lose the love and kindness they gave us when we were at our lowest - physically and mentally. They gave us hope and strength to go on and we thank you Lord for them.

Loss of a Stranger who became a Friend:

Remember the times in your life when a stranger suddenly appeared and became your friend. I have seen it happen. Its one of those inexplicable things that occur in life out of the blue! But,it is welcome once we realize the magic of such a relationship. It just happens and out of nowhere comes this extraordinary kindness and understanding that with time becomes one of the strongest and durable relationships in life. Totally unexpected, but totally blessed and enduring. Filling the void when no one else is there. Lord we are very grateful of such encounters and life-long friendships.

Prayer:

How wondrously you have filled the void and aching emptiness in our lives when there was no-one to go to. Out of the blue, through an unexpected encounter to find a wonderful friend. When such a friend is gone we are lost and undone. Thinking that never again will such an encounter and friendship be found. The sudden advent of such a friend and then the loss is unimaginable. Help us Lord who have had such a privilege in life, to be grateful for such magic in our lives, and grant us the strength to bear this loss when it is gone.

Loss of Someone who changed your life:

Mine was Marion Olsen, the wife of Rev. Calvin Olson, beloved pastor of the Assembly of God Church, Dhaka, Bangladesh. I would go to Marion for bible study. She is the one who recognized the deep pain inside me during one of our church services. She was sitting next to me. Marion immediately knew my pain and longing. I was very lonely. In that darkness Jesus found me again through our beloved Marion. I found love and forgiveness awaiting me in Christ's love. From childhood the Lord Jesus was my best friend apart from my mother and later my husband. Then I strayed for a while looking for Jesus all over again. I found Him again through my dear Marion who lived for the Lord and is now with the Him.

Prayer:

Lord Jesus thank you for these totally unexpected and magical moments in life when in the blink of an eye life can change forever, like it did for me through Marion. I miss her and her love and friendship, but know she is with you, above all pain and grief. Thank you for her life. She helped me to bring about this lasting change that brings love, joy and peace through your everlasting promise of redemption. I miss her very much Lord, but know she is with you.

You provide this kind of grace for all who come to you. Please provide such blessings for all of us still looking for such " magic", and help us to bear this immeasurable loss, and look to the day when we will be reunited.

As we grieve and pray for someone lost, something gone forever from this earthly existence, something or someone we can no longer see, touch or feel on this earth, may our Lord Jesus, our precious Saviour who knows what loss is, give us the strength, the faith, and the conviction that nothing in His Kingdom is lost forever, but saved and cherished till we meet again. Amen

<u>Prayer of Thanks:</u>

Thank you Lord for granting me persons in my life who have made me who I am through your love and forgiveness. Help me to remember the blessings through joy and loss. May the love of those no longer with us be a light to shine on our path till the end comes. Amen